Quality community facilities - the secret to successful high streets

Urban Design Group

28 February 2019

Tibbalds
planning and urban design

Location and Context

Key:

- Study area
- Major roads
- Railway
- Train stations
- Proximity areas
- Leisure hubs
- Protection of open space
- Other green areas
- River Medway
- Other major local activities
- Core retail areas
- Retail allocations
- Educational and leisure facilities

Located within north Kent, Gillingham is the eastern most of the Medway towns of Strood, Rochester and Chatham. Gillingham's town centre – the focus of this project – is at the heart of the town, close to the railway station and surrounded by residential development, but within a short distance of the bigger town centre at Chatham. It serves a local function, predominantly attracting people from close by on foot.

Located on the northern side of Gillingham, at the riverside, are two out-of-centre retail and leisure hubs, which are likely to attract people from distance due to their size, proximity to the river, accessibility and the range of activities.

To the southwest, Chatham town centre is the main centre in the area, offering a higher order of shops and services. Combined with this, Chatham has a good food and beverage offer and an established evening economy based around a range of activities, including a theatre and bingo hall. The area between Chatham town centre and Gillingham town centre is occupied by the Great Lines Heritage Park, a significant open space protected as a conservation area and wrapped up in the maritime history of the area.

Gillingham town centre has a railway station, which offers access directly into the high street, the town centre is well connected with surrounding streets particularly on the northern side; connections to the south are more constrained due to the railway. It is therefore accessible by a range of means to residents and visitors to the town. In addition, the town centre has the potential to attract students from the nearby educational institutions to the north and may also benefit from being close to significant neighbouring land uses including Medway Maritime Hospital, Gillingham FC stadium.

In terms of its proximity to other centres, Gillingham's core retail area is around 15 mins away from one of the northern leisure hubs. The connection with Chatham town centre is encouraged by Great Lines Heritage Park which facilitates pedestrian links between the two local hearts.

Gillingham Town Centre
Local context

drawing no.
client Medway Council
scale 1:10000 @ A3
date 19-06-2018

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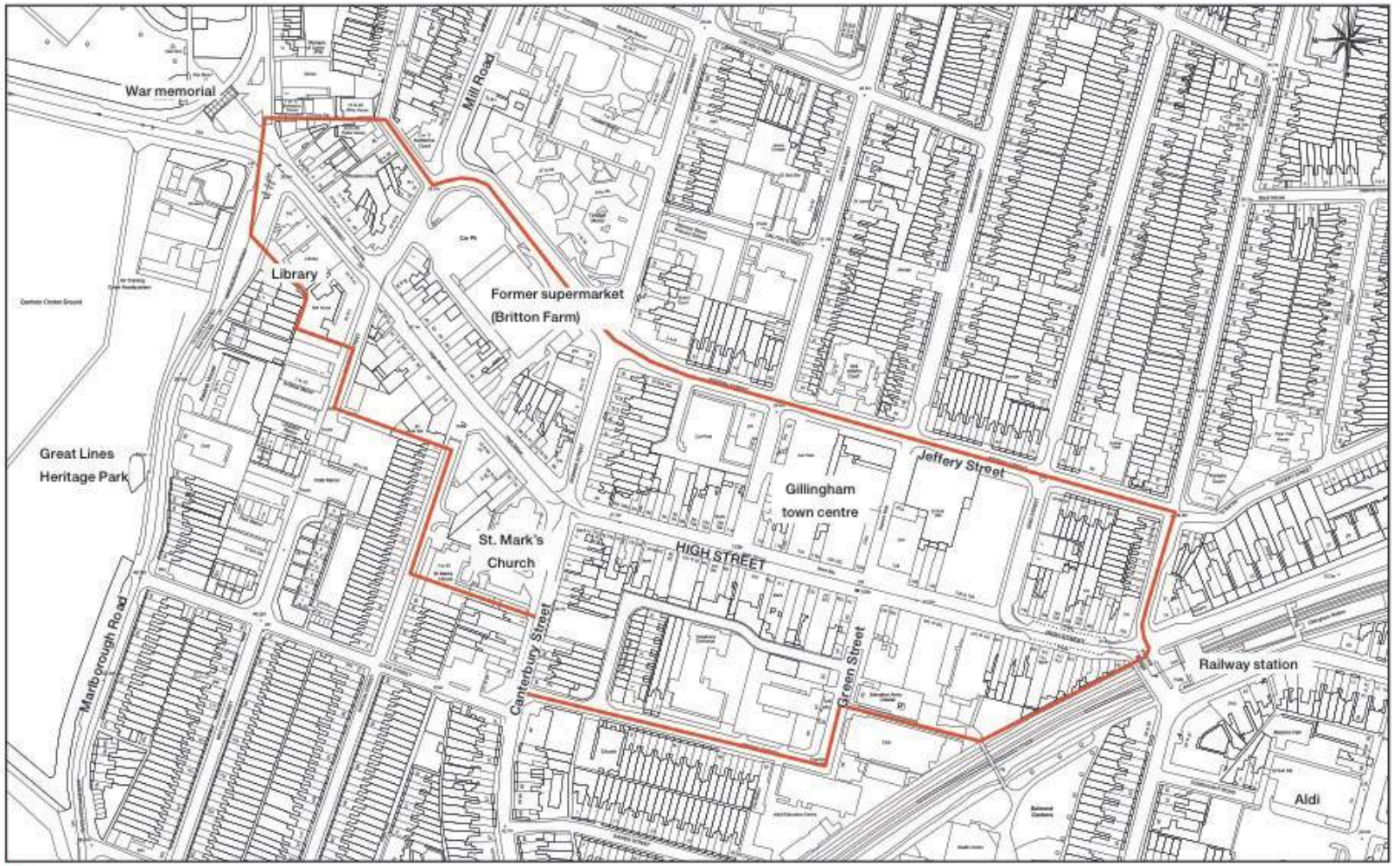
Purpose of the work
and Study Area



- Production of a masterplan for the defined centre in Gillingham (red line on the adjacent map)
- 'to determine key development opportunities and demonstrate the deliverability of proposals'
- Evidence base for the Local Plan
- Similar work for Strood and Chatham

Railway station, High Street (far east)

Smaller units, High Street (east)

Street trees to the western end

Larger retail units, central High Street

Market / smaller units, High Street (west)

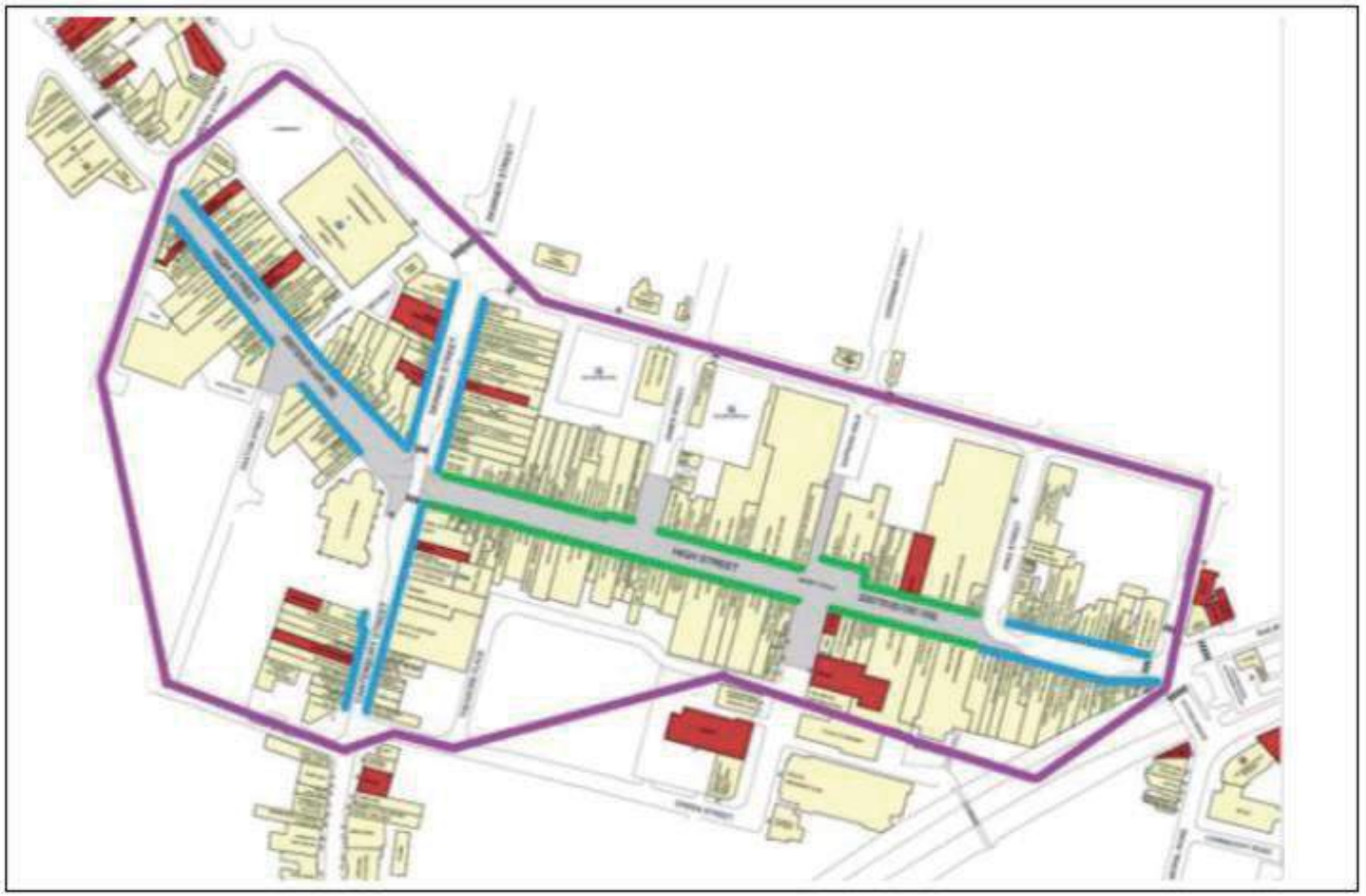
Some heritage buildings exist

Britton Farm mall

Food and drink, High Street (far west)

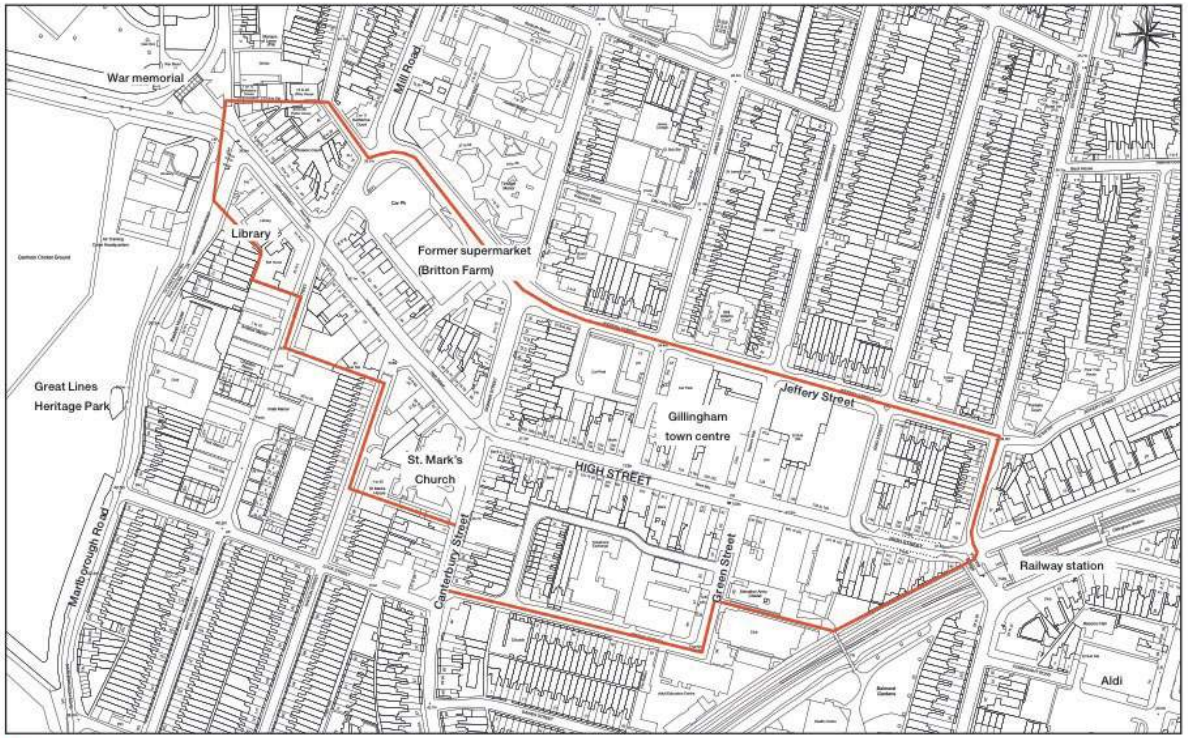
Gillingham's town centre
Planning Policy

Retail Designation 5c: Gillingham District Centre



- Town centre tightly defined around the retail functions
- Defines primary and secondary areas
- Acknowledged the need for town centres to have other services and functions within it – but not reflected in the boundary

Gillingham's High Street
and looking more widely



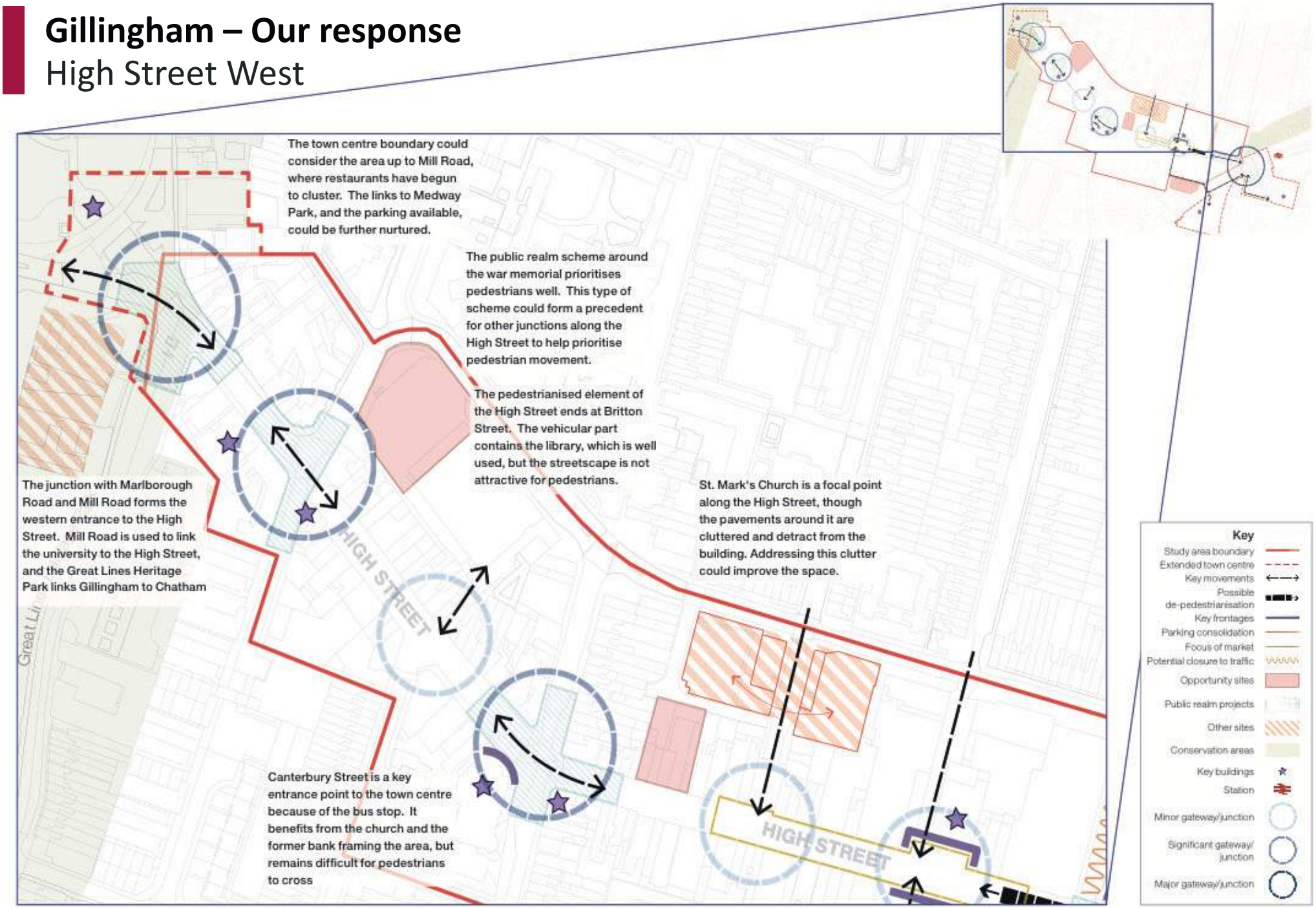
- Length of High Street a possible constraint
- **Eastern end**
  - station gateway
  - Aldi and health centre considered outside the town centre
- **Central areas**
  - retail core
  - clear focal points
- **Western end**
  - independent shops
  - but library and sports centre considered outside of the centre
- Market draws people in on Monday and Saturday

Gillingham

Engagement and consultation

- desire for a better town centre – more shops, greater diversity and more independent shops
- but people used the town centre for much more than retail and valued the other services
  - the leisure centre
  - the library
  - the health centre and play space
  - food and drink
- dispersal and decline of retail in the town centre threatens to take those other services with it
- it also undermines the effectiveness, or reason to invest in, of other forms of travel
- those more vulnerable to decline were at risk of becoming more isolated
- the accessibility of the town centre and the range of services – beyond the retail functions – creates critical mass and linked trips

Gillingham – Our response
High Street West


The town centre boundary could consider the area up to Mill Road, where restaurants have begun to cluster. The links to Medway Park, and the parking available, could be further nurtured.
The public realm scheme around the war memorial prioritises pedestrians well. This type of scheme could form a precedent for other junctions along the High Street to help prioritise pedestrian movement.
The pedestrianised element of the High Street ends at Britton Street. The vehicular part contains the library, which is well used, but the streetscape is not attractive for pedestrians.
The junction with Marlborough Road and Mill Road forms the western entrance to the High Street. Mill Road is used to link the university to the High Street, and the Great Lines Heritage Park links Gillingham to Chatham
St. Mark's Church is a focal point along the High Street, though the pavements around it are cluttered and detract from the building. Addressing this clutter could improve the space.
Canterbury Street is a key entrance point to the town centre because of the bus stop. It benefits from the church and the former bank framing the area, but remains difficult for pedestrians to cross
HIGH STREET
HIGH STREET
Key
Study area boundary
Extended town centre
Key movements
Possible de-pedestrianisation
Key frontages
Parking consolidation
Focus of market
Potential closure to traffic
Opportunity sites
Public realm projects
Other sites
Conservation areas
Key buildings
Station
Minor gateway/junction
Significant gateway/ junction
Major gateway/junction

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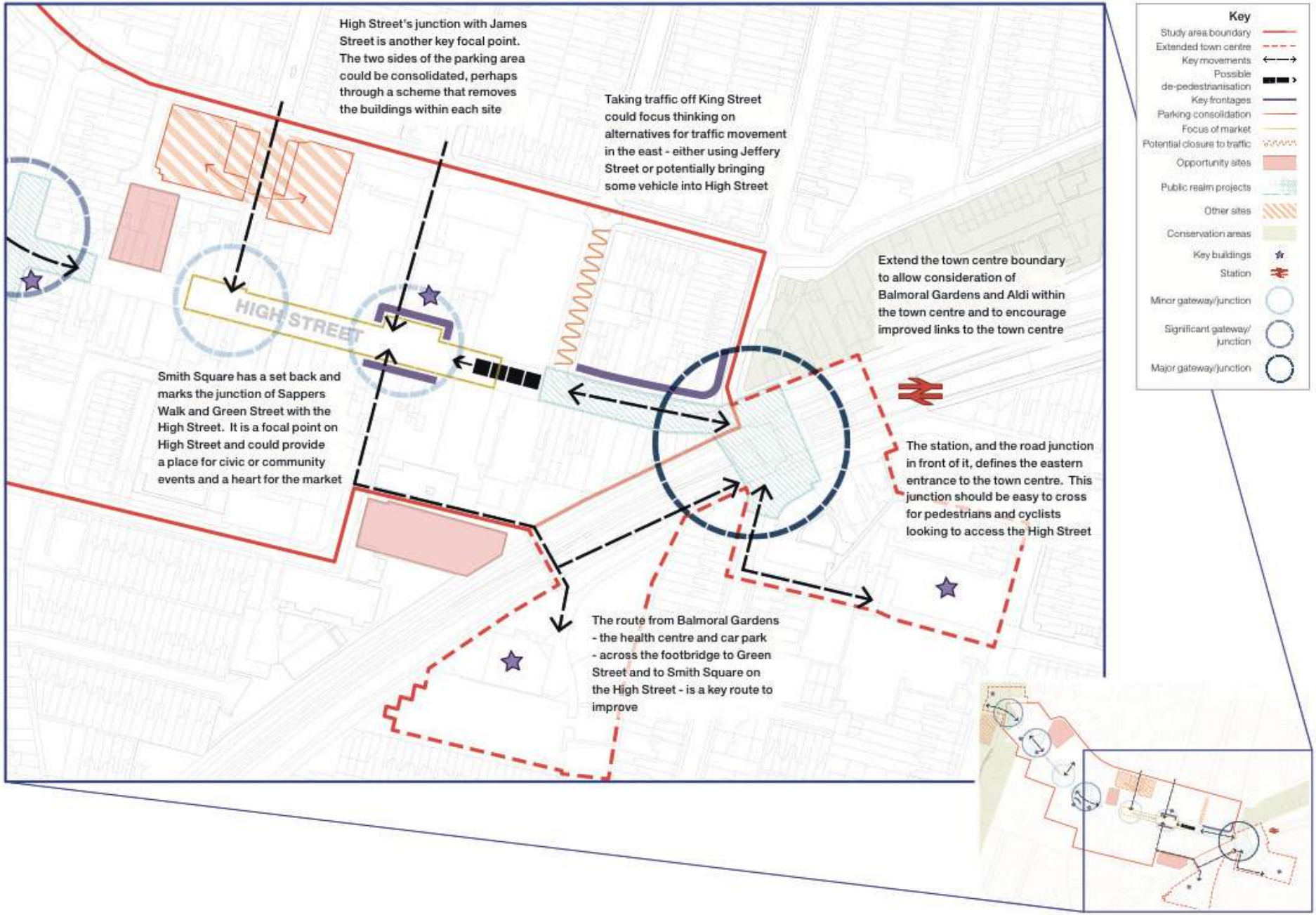
Gillingham – Our response

High Street East


High Street's junction with James Street is another key focal point. The two sides of the parking area could be consolidated, perhaps through a scheme that removes the buildings within each site
Taking traffic off King Street could focus thinking on alternatives for traffic movement in the east - either using Jeffery Street or potentially bringing some vehicle into High Street
HIGH STREET
Extend the town centre boundary to allow consideration of Balmoral Gardens and Aldi within the town centre and to encourage improved links to the town centre
Smith Square has a set back and marks the junction of Sappers Walk and Green Street with the High Street. It is a focal point on High Street and could provide a place for civic or community events and a heart for the market
The station, and the road junction in front of it, defines the eastern entrance to the town centre. This junction should be easy to cross for pedestrians and cyclists looking to access the High Street
The route from Balmoral Gardens - the health centre and car park - across the footbridge to Green Street and to Smith Square on the High Street - is a key route to improve
Key
Study area boundary
Extended town centre
Key movements
Possible de-pedestrianisation
Key frontages
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Key factors

Summary of the main points from Gillingham

- Think about the town centre more broadly than retail
- Widen the boundary to make linkages between retail and non-retail uses
- Support non-retail assets, address their issues
- Define character areas and nurture uses where they are establishing / established
- Thinkabout a broad demography; who is using the centre, at what times and why
- Create good linkages between areas (public realm / wayfinding)
- Homes in the town centre